



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 West 15th Street, Suite 3200
HELENA, MONTANA 59626

Ref: 8MO

July 3, 2007

Ms. Deborah A.H. Austin, Forest Supervisor
Lolo National Forest
Building 24A, Fort Missoula
Missoula, MT 59804

Re: CEQ 20070226; Frenchtown Face Ecosystem
Restoration Project Final Supplemental EIS and
Record of Decision

Dear Ms. Austin:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Frenchtown Face Ecosystem Restoration Project.

We appreciate receipt of clarification in the FSEIS and ROD that the selected Alternative 5 is based on the earlier modified Alternative 5 in the February 2006 ROD (i.e., including timber harvest on 3,621 acres {with prescribed burning of 3,598 of those acres}; additional prescribed burning on 6,488 acres; 3.5 miles of temporary road construction; 54.9 miles of road reconstruction {48.8 miles to incorporate BMPs, and 6.1 miles to access timber}; decommissioning 114.7 miles of road with 19 culvert removals; rehabilitation of ½ mile of a placer mining site on Little McCormick Creek; OHV enforcement, and OHV education in local area schools). We also appreciate the additional soils analysis and monitoring conducted for the Supplemental EIS, and the earlier reduction of 2.7 miles of road construction and 6.7 miles of road reconstruction; and reduction of 920 acres in timber harvest to protect old growth and fisheries and to accommodate a land exchange.

As stated in our earlier comments, the EPA supports the purpose and need of the Frenchtown Face Ecosystem Restoration Project to maintain and improve wildlife habitat and security and water quality and fish habitat; reduce roads while maintaining reasonable access; control noxious weeds; and reduce fire risk and improve fire protection and forest health. While there are potential concerns about short-term impacts to 303(d) listed streams, we believe the proposed road decommissioning and road improvement work and other restoration work associated with the proposed project are likely to result in long-term reductions in sediment production and delivery to streams that will more than compensate for the small amount of sediment production and delivery that may result from proposed timber harvest and prescribed burning activities. We also appreciate Forest Service involvement in the local Ninemile Watershed Group, and in Ninemile Creek TMDL development and water quality monitoring.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed project and participate during the NEPA process. If you have any questions regarding EPA input please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at (406) 457-5022 or in Missoula at 406-329-3313.

Sincerely,

John F. Wardell
Director
Montana Office

cc: Larry Svoboda/Julia Johnson, EPA 8EPR-N, Denver